



WESTPORT, CONNECTICUT

JAMES S. MARPE
First Selectman

March 23, 2018

The Connecticut General Assembly, Judiciary Committee
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Testimony in support of:

H.B. No. 5540 - AN ACT CONCERNING GHOST GUNS AND THE PERMIT APPLICATION
PROCESS.

And

H.B. No. 5542 - AN ACT CONCERNING BUMP STOCKS AND OTHER MEANS OF ENHANCING
THE RATE OF FIRE OF A FIREARM

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the Town of Westport, we want to inform this legislative body that Westport's political and police leadership and many of our residents stand united in their support of H.B. No. 5540 and H.B. No. 5542. Westporters are increasingly concerned about both the availability of weapons and the accessories that modify firearms to be more lethal than they already are.

Less than one month ago, Westport had an incident at its high school that had the potential for a serious and life-threatening outcome. Our Police Department and the Westport Public School's administrators, teachers and employees acted efficiently, professionally and with exceptional prowess. However, while the final result was a positive one, the circumstances surrounding the immediate investigation and police action was exacerbated and prolonged by the uncertainty over whether the student involved with the threat might have purchased a ghost gun or had adapted one or more of accessible weapons with a bump stock. Numerous Westporters, including students, parents, and school and town administrators, were faced with hours of emotional turmoil while the situation was resolved.

The very real threat to public safety - to our students and first responders in particular- that the possibility of the involvement of these unregulated guns can create was evident to us in Westport during the near miss we experienced.

Research shows that bump stocks greatly degrade the accuracy of a firearm. This inaccuracy renders the practice of using a bump stock for precision target shooting moot, but bump stocks are becoming increasingly popular for applications where volume of fire is favored over accuracy. None of the techniques associated with a bump stock means that a firearm can fire more than one round with a single trigger pull; rather they compensate for biomechanical limitations associated with how fast a finger can repetitively pull the trigger. In the 2017 Las Vegas shooting, the shooter utilized numerous bump stocks, along with other fire power, to create widespread carnage. Clearly, as was the case in Las Vegas, there is no reason why an owner of a legal firearm should have the means to enhance an already lethal weapon.

Banning the sale or transfer, possession, manufacturing or use of bump stocks or other accessories to increase the rate of fire of a firearm will be an important step in limiting access to increased capability of already deadly weapons and for increasing public safety.

Westport Police Chief Foti Koskinas is a vocal advocate for gun safety. He has stated, "Ghost guns are a terrifying threat to public safety, and to the safety of law enforcement. I can't even believe passing legislation to ban them is a point of contention."

As a gun violence prevention advocate, Melissa Kane has worked for many years to educate others on how to make our communities safer. Ms. Kane, Chief Koskinas and other elected officials are working at the municipal level on a number of initiatives that will make Westport safe from gun violence, but we cannot address the threat presented by ghost guns or bump stocks alone. We need the State of Connecticut to act.

These bills do that. And H.B. No. 5540 in particular does so on numerous levels.

Anyone can purchase and make these firearms. Anyone can use them.


Chief Koskinas often speaks about the fact that issuing gun permits - even following all the laws we have in place, is the worst part of his job; he has so little information on the people applying. He has advocated publicly for better background checks including the ability to interview family members. The jurisdiction to better determine an applicant's suitability for a permit to carry a firearm in public, as called for in Bill 5540, is very much endorsed by Westport law enforcement.

Some gun legislation that has already been passed, and which the vast majority of those in this State have supported, may be considered controversial by some. However, the passage of a law to regulate guns which are otherwise completely untraceable and allow the purchaser to evade our own background-check laws should not be controversial.


In conclusion, ghost guns and bump stocks are workarounds to the laws we already have in place in Connecticut to regulate who can own guns and what type of guns it is legal to own. Westporters stand united - beyond any political divide - in our desire to reduce gun related deaths and injuries in our community and our state.

On behalf of the Town of Westport, we urge you to vote "yes" on Bill No. 5540 and Bill No. 5542.

Sincerely,



James S. Marpe
First Selectman



Melissa Kane
Selectwoman